

HARRISON R. BLANCHARD.

MARCH 4, 1840.

Read, and laid upon the table.

Mr. THOMPSON, of Massachusetts, from the Committee on the Public Lands, made the following

REPORT:

*The Committee on the Public Lands, to whom was referred the petition of Harrison R. Blanchard, have had the same under consideration, and submit the following report :*

The petitioner, Harrison R. Blanchard, substantially sets forth, that in 1834 he erected a steam saw-mill on the St. John's river, near the town of Jacksonville, in the Territory of Florida, under the belief that the lands adjacent to his mill, which abound in good pine timber, but which are sterile, and wholly unfit for cultivation, would soon be thrown into open market. The lands were not brought into market as he expected ; but by purchasing timber from persons holding grants of land in the neighborhood, he carried on his mill successfully till hostilities with the Seminole Indians commenced. His workmen having been pressed into the service of the Government, he was constrained to stop his mill. Recently, by great energy and expense, his mill has been put into operation. But, in the meantime, different individuals, discovering the pine lands to be valuable, rendered so by the erection of his mill, had acquired pre-emption rights, and had perfected titles to the circumjacent lands. And now, by a combination of the land-owners, the price of pine-trees is so enhanced that he cannot continue his mill in operation without heavy loss, or becoming a trespasser upon the public land.

The petitioner asks permission to enter 2,500 acres of land at \$1 25 per acre, in order that he may have lumber to keep his mill employed until the residue of the public lands are thrown into market. He believes that such land as he requires will never sell for more than the minimum Government price. 500 of the 2,500 acres he desires to locate on Cedar creek, several miles from the St. John's river ; the residue (2,000 acres) to be taken on the St. John's river. He is willing to have his location subject to the approval of the register and receiver at St. Augustine, or of any other person or persons designated by Congress.

This petitioner then argues the advantages, comforts, and conveniences, furnished to early settlers by the successful operation of such mills ; and that as Spain gratuitously bestowed large grants of land on those who erected such mills in the province, our Government would act wisely, in view of much greater advantages derived to it, to accede to his proposition.

The committee are of the opinion that the pre-emption system is founded in justice and sound policy. The preference-sale of a small tract of land at the minimum price to the hardy pioneer, who leaves the endeared scenes of his youth, sunders the ties of friendship and kindred, penetrates the unbroken wilderness, surmounts the many obstacles of a first settlement, destroys the prowling beasts of the forest, and prepares the country for an easy and safe immigration, is not only just in itself, but conducive to the prosperity and best interests of our growing Republic. But it is obviously impolitic, unsafe, and at variance with the known policy of this Government, in regard to her public domain, to grant to any one individual, under any pretext whatever, the right and privilege to locate and purchase large tracts of land at the minimum price, and more especially such a privilege as is asked for in this instance—to enter two large tracts, at a distance from each other, without any restriction or specification as to the lands to be entered.

It is the opinion of your committee, therefore, that the prayer of the petitioner should not be granted.

The petitioner, Harrison K. Blanchard, substantially sets forth, that in 1834 he erected a steam saw-mill on the St. John's river, near the town of Jacksonville, in the Territory of Florida, under the belief that the lands adjacent to his mill, which stood in good pine timber, but which are sterile, and wholly unfit for cultivation, would soon be thrown into open market. The lands were not brought into market as he expected; but by purchasing timber from persons holding grants of land in the neighborhood, he carried on his mill successfully till hostilities with the Seminole Indians commenced. His workmen having been pressed into the service of the Government, he was constrained to stop his mill. Recently, by great energy and expense, his mill has been put into operation. But in the means, different individuals, discovering the pine lands to be valuable, resented so by the erection of his mill, had acquired pre-emption rights, and had perfected titles to the circumjacent lands. And now, by a combination of the land-owners, the price of pine-trees is so enhanced that he cannot continue his mill in operation without heavy loss, or becoming a trespasser upon the public land.

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This petitioner then urges the advantages, comfort, and convenience, promised to early settlers by the successful operation of such mills; and that as Spain generously bestowed large grants of land on those who erected such mills in the province, our Government would act wisely, in view of much greater advantages derived to it, to accede to his proposition.